

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5578

INFO ABU DHABI 913

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SA, EG, LE, SY, XF

SUBJECT: LEBANESE CRISIS COMPLICATES SAUDI WORLD VIEW

REF: A) JIDDA 4832 B) JIDDA 4623 C) JIDDA 4241 D) JIDDA 4255

E) JIDDA 944

SUMMARY: THE SAUDI ARE FINDING THE WORLD A LESS COMFORTABLE PLACE OF LATE. THE DEEPENED EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN SPLIT AFTER SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON HAS FURTHER ERODED THEIR SENSE OF SECURITY AND CONFIDENCE THAT THEY AND THEIR FRIENDS CAN CONTROL THE COURSE OF EVENTS IN THE AREA. THE SAG NOW SUPPORTS THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON

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AS THE ONLY PROMISING MEANS OF BRINGING THE CONFLICT TO AN END.

THE SAUDIS SYMPATHIZE WITH THE AGONY OF THE LEBANESE, BUT AT THIS TIME THE DIVISIVE EFFECT OF THE CIVIL WAR ON ARAB UNITY HAS BECOME A MORE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION. THE SAG IS UNLIKELY PUBLICLY TO VOICE SUPPORT FOR SYRIAN ACTIONS BECAUSE THEY ARE UNPOPULAR IN MOST OF THE REST OF THE ARAB WORLD AND PARTICULARLY BECAUSE THE SAG DOES NOT WISH TO ANTAGONIZE EGYPT. THE SAUDIS WILL CONTINUE THEIR MEDIATION EFFORT BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA, BUT FOR THE PRESENT THEY SEEM TO HAVE DISCOVERED THE LIMITS OF THEIR INFLUENCE. WE EXPECT THAT THE SAUDIS WILL ACT TO RESTRAIN BUT NOT OPPOSE MEASURED SYRIAN ACTIONS. WE THINK THAT THEY WILL ALSO CONTINUE TO USE THEIR ECONOMIC POWER TO GET EGYPT TO MODERATE ITS OPPOSITION TO SYRIA--A STANCE WHICH THEY REGARD AS UNWARRANTED AND SHORTSIGHTED. THE SAG SHOWS NO SIGN OF ABANDONING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE PLO BUT THEY DO NOT APPEAR AVERSE TO SEEING IT CUT DOWN TO SIZE IN LEBANON AND WOULD PROBABLY BE RECEPTIVE TO IMAGINATIVE NEW APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM OF THE PALESTINIANS. IT IS IN THE US INTEREST THAT SAUDI ARABIA CONTINUE TO TRY TO PLAY THE ROLE OF BALANCE WHEEL KEEPING THE MIDDLE EAST FROM FLYING APART. END SUMMARY.

1. IN RECENT MONTHS THE WORLD HAS BECOME A MUCH LESS COMFORTABLE AND REASSURING PLACE FOR SAUDI ARABIA. IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE OCTOBER WAR SAUDI LEADERS HAD MUCH TO BE HAPPY ABOUT. THE KINGDOM HAD EMERGED FROM THE WAR WITH ITS ARAB CREDENTIALS BURNISHED FOR HAVING USED THE "OIL WEAPON"; INCREASED OIL PRICES HAD GIVEN THE KINGDOM THE PROMISE OF GREAT WEALTH AND A NEW AND HEADY POWER (THE DRAWBACKS OF WEALTH AND POWER WERE NOT YET EVIDENT); THE ARAB WORLD WAS IN A RARE STATE OF UNITY; THERE WERE REASONABLE AND BENIGN REGIMES IN BOTH EGYPT AND SYRIA; THE GOVERNMENT IN IRAQ WAS STILL HOSTILE BUT ISOLATED AND EFFECTIVELY IMPOTENT; AND THERE SEEMED REAL PROSPECTS FOR SOLUTION OF THE ARAB-ISRAEL DISPUTE.

2. THE LATE KING FAISAL WAS NOTHING IF NOT CAUTIOUS, BUT IN THIS CLIMATE HE SANCTIONED AND ORCHESTED A NEW, MORE OUTGOING AND ACTIVIST FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE KINGDOM.

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THE SAUDI LEADERSHIP SEEMED TO FEEL THAT WITH THE COOPERATION OF EGYPT AND SYRIA ANYTHING WAS POSSIBLE SOMETHING LIKE A DAMASCUS-RIYADH-CAIRO AXIS WAS BEGINNING TO TAKE SHAPE.

3. THIS PLEASING AND COHERENT WORLD BEGAN TO GET OUT OF JOINT WITH THE SIGNING OF THE SECOND SINAI AGREEMENT. THE SAUDIS HAD RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE AGREEMENT--RESERVA-

TIONS WHICH WERE TO DEEPEN AS ALL THE DETAILS CAME OUT-- BUT THEY DID GIVE IT INITIAL LUKE-WARM SUPPORT. THEY WERE NOT PREPARED, HOWEVER, FOR THE VEHEMENCE OF THE SYRIAN REACTION. THE RESULTING VERBAL WARFARE BETWEEN THE SYRIANS AND EGYPTIANS MADE THE SAUDIS FEEL THEIR POSITION BECOMING DISTINCLTY LESS COMFORTABLE, ESPECIALLY AS EACH OF THE PROTAGONISTS TRIED TO GET THEM INTO ITS OWN CORNER.

4. THE SAUDI LEADERSHIP HAS MANY YEARS EXPERIENCE IN AVOIDING CONTROVERSY AND NOT TAKING SIDES IN OTHERS' QUARRELS. IT ALSO HAS DEVELOPED SOME LITTLE EXPERIENCE IN WIELDING THE POWER THAT OMCES FROM GREAT WEALTH. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES IT BELIEVED IT SOWN INTERESTS WERE SUFFICIENTLY AT STAKE TO RISH PLAYING THE THANKLESS TASK OF MEDIATOR. THOUGH IT WAS PROVING VERY EXPENSIVE TO BE A LEADER IN THE ARAB WORLD, SAUDI ARABIA SEEMED TO BE DOING QUITE WELL AT IT UNTIL THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR CAME ALONG AS A FORCE WITH WHICH THE SAUDIS COULD NOT CONTEND. IT HAS SET THE SYRIANS AND THE EGYPTIANS AT EACH OTHER IN EARNEST AND APPARENTLY BEYOND THE SAUDI POWER TO RECTIFY.

5. THERE HAS BEEN CONDIERABLE EVOLUTION IN THE SAUDI VIEW OF THE LEBANSE CRISIS. (SEE JIDDA 944 FOR A MORE DETAILED SURVEY OF SAUDI-LEBANESE RELATIONS AS OF FEBRUARY) LEBANESE AND SAUDIS HAVE TRADITIONALLY REGARDED EACH OTHER WITH A POLITELY CONCEALED CONTEMPT BUT THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A MUTUAL SATISFACTION IN THE RELATIONSHIP. THE SAUDIS HAD GOTTEN ALONG WELL WITH LEBANON'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS-- PERHAPS BETTER THEN WITH THE MUSLIM LEADERS BECAUSE THEY WERE MORE EFFECTIVE IN GOVERNING AND PROFESSED A PLEASING POLITICAL CONSERVATISM. FOR SOME MONTHS THIS RESULTED

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IN A CONCERNED SAUDI NEUTRALITY TOWARDS THE STRIFE. THE HEIGHTENED CONFESSIONALISM AND COMMUNAL BARBARITY PARTICULARLY EVIDENT IN LATE 1975 AND EARLY 1976 CAUSED A SAUDI TILT TOWARDS THE "MUSLIM/LEFTISTS". THE VIRTUAL DISAPPEARANCE OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE TRADITIONAL LEBANESE MUSLIM LEADERSHIP, THE ALMOST COMPLETE DOMINANCE OF THE "NATIONALIST" MOVEMENT BY THE PALESTINIANS, AND THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION HAVE COMBINED TO BRING ABOUT A SWING OF SAUDI SENTIMENTS BACK TOWARDS NEUTRALITY. AT THE SAME TIME--WHILE THE SAUDIS FEEL GENUINE SORROW AT THE LEBANESE AGONY--THE LEBANESE STRUGGLE ITSELF HAS NOW BECOME MUCH LESS IMPORTANT IN SAUDI EYES THAN THE EFFECT IT IS HAVING ON THE REST OF THE ARAB WORLD, AND PARTICULARLY ON RELATIONS BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA WITH WHOM THE SAG DESPERATELY WANTS CONCORDANCE AND UNDERSTANDING.

6. THE SAUDIS HAVE BEEN AND WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY  
REMAIN PUBLICLY SILENT ON THE SUBJECT, BUT THERE IS NO  
DOUBT THAT THE SAG SUPPORTS THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN  
LEBANON AS THE ONLY PRACTICAL WAY OF CURBING LEFTIST  
MILITARY ELEMENTS AND OF BRINGING THE FIGHTING TO A HALT.  
THEY HAVE LONG SINCE LOST ANY ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE  
EFFICACY OF A "COMBINED ARAB FORCE" AND WE BELIEVE THEY  
WOULD JUMP AT THE CHANCE TO EXTRICATE THEIR OWN ARAB  
LEAGUE CONTINGENT FROM THE LEBANESE MEAT GRINDER. THE  
SAUDI ATTITUDE HAS BEEN INFLUENCED ALSO BY MISGIVINGS  
ABOUT THE ROLE THE PLO HAS ASSUMED IN LEBANON. IN A  
MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR IN EARLY JULY THE UNDER SECRETARY  
FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS (WHO HAD JUST COME FROM A MEETING  
WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER) DECLARED IN AN UNCOMMONLY  
POSITIVE FASHION THAT THE ONLY SOLUTION FOR LEBANON NOW  
IS A MILITARY SOLUTION. (REF A) IT WAS CLEAR THAT THIS SOLUTION  
WOULD INVOLVE DEFEAT OR RETREAT FOR THE PALESTINIANS IN  
LEBANON. FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD HAS BEEN SAYING THAT  
THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT MUST BE DEFUSED AND TO THIS END  
THE PALESTINIANS MUST BE GIVEN A NATION OF THEIR OWN IN  
THE ISRELI-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES I.E., GAZA AND THE WEST  
BANK).

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5579

INFO ABU DHABI 914

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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AMEMBASSY TEHRAN  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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7. THIS GENERAL SUPPORT FOR SYRIA IN LEBANON IS NOT A POLICY WITHOUT RISKS AND DIFFICULTIES. THE SAG HAS NO DESIRE TO SHARE THE WIDESPREAD OPPROBRIUM IN THE ARAB AND THIRD WORLDS FOR SYRIAN ACTIONS. NOR DOES SAUDI ARABIA WISH TO ANTAGONIZE EGYPT WHICH HAS CHOSEN TO VIEW LEBANON AS A ZERO SUM GAME IN WHICH SYRIAN GAIN EQUATES TO EGYPTIAN LOSS. THE SAUDIS CONSIDER THIS POLICY WRONG-HEADED BUT IN ATTEMPTING TO CHANGE IT THEY HAVE DISCOVERED THE LIMITS OF THEIR POWERS OF PERSUASION. THE EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP APPARENTLY BELIEVES THAT THE SAG HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO CONTINUE ITS EXTENSIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND IS SUFFICIENTLY SURE OF ITS POSITION PUBLICLY TO EXPRESS DISSATISFACTION AT THE CURRENT AND PROJECTED  
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LEVEL OF THAT FINANACIAL AID--TO THE CONSIDERABLE DIS-GRUNTLEMENT OF THE SAG.

8. MEANWHILE JORDAN, IN THE SAUDI VIEW, IS ONLY FURTHER AGGRAVATING THE PROBLEM BY SIDING SO COMPLETELY WITH THE SYRIANS. NOT ONLY DOES THIS INCREASE EGYPTIAN ANGER AND FRUSTRATION OVER THE SYRIAN ROLE, BUT IT CREATES ANOTHER PROBLEM WHICH WILL NOT AUTOMATICALLY GO AWAY EVEN IF EGYPT AND SYRIA CAN BE BROUGHT TO BURY THE HATCHET. FURTHER TO COMPOUND THE SAUDI SENSE OF MALAISE, IRAQ, PERHAPS NOW FEELING LESS ISOLATED AND VULNERABLE IN THE BREAKUP OF ARAB UNITY, HAS BEGUN TOBE VOCALLY UNPLEASANT. THE SOURCE OF THIS APPARENTLY LIES IN IRAQI UNHAPPINESS OVER SAUDI PRE-EMINENCE IN OIL PRICING POLICIES.

9. THE ONLY BRIGHT SIDE OF THIS SAUDI DISCOMFORT AS FAR AS THE US IS CONCERNED IS THAT OLD FRIENDSHIPS ASSUME RENEWED IMPORTANCE IN ADVERISTY. SAUDI LEADERS OF LATE SEEM MORE SOLICITOUS THAN EVER OF US UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT. WE JUDGE THAT THE SAG REALIZES IT CANNOT WITHDRAW FROM THE PROBLEMS CREATED BY LEBANON, EVEN IF IT WISHED, AND THAT IT WILL CONTINUE TO FUNCTION AS A BALANCE WHEEL TRYING TO KEEP THE MIDDLE EAST FROM FLYING APART. SAUDI LEADERS WILL CONTINUE THEIR EFFORTS TO MEDIATE BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA. THE SAUDIS KNOW THAT THEIR INFLUENCE HAS LIMITS

BUT ALSO THAT IT IS NOT WITHOUT EFFECT. THEY WILL ACT TO RESTRAIN THE SYRIANS FROM PRECIPITOUS ACTION, BUT NOT OPPOSE MEASURED ATTEMPTS TO PACIFY LEBANON AND BRING THE PLO UNDER CONTROL. THEY APPRECIATE HOW MUCH ASAD HAS AT STAKE. THEY WILL ALSO EXERT INFLUENCE ON LEBANESE OF ALL POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS PERSUASION, URGING COMPROMISE AND AGREEMENT WHEN THE SITUATION THERE EVOLVES TO THE POINT THAT WHAT THE LEBANESE WANT AGAIN BECOMES RELEVANT. THE SAUDIS WILL ALSO KEEP THE PRESSURE ON THE EGYPTIANS TO GO EASY ON ASAD IN THE THOUGHT THAT THE EGYPTIAN STAKE IN LEBANON IS OBJECTIVELY NOT THAT GREAT AND THAT SAUDI FRIENDSHIP AND GENEROSITY OUGHT THEREFORE TO BE WORTH A MORE REASONABLE EGYPTIAN STANCE.

10. WE KNOW UNFORTUNATELY LITTLE ABOUT SAUDI THINKING ON THE PALESTINIANS. THERE HAS CERTAINLY BEEN NO DIMIN-  
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UTION IN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE PLO AS AN ORGANIZATION. (THE SAUDIS HAVE IF ANYTHING INCREASED PRESSURE ON WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN RECENT WEEKS TO "RECOGNIZE" THE PLO WITH THE ARGUMENT THAT EVEN THE AMERICANS ARE MOVING IN THAT DIRECTION AND IT WOULD BE BETTER NOT TO BE LEFT BEHIND.) THOUGH THE SAG WOULD BE HAPPY TO SEE THE SYRIANS CUT THE PLO DOWN TO SIZE, THEY ARE CONCERED THAT WHAT REMAINS OF THE MOVEMENT WILL BECOME FRAGMENTED AND RADICALIZED, UNABLE TO BE IGNORED IN REACHING PEACE WITH ISRAEL BUT UNWILLING TO COMPROMISE AND THUS EFFECTIVE AS A SPOILER. THE SAUDIS HAVE NEVER BEEN ENAMORED WITH ARAFAT, BUT THEY HAVE REGARDED HIM AS THE MOST MODERATE AND EFFECTIVE LEADER LIKELY TO BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE BROAD BODY OF PALESTINIANS. WE THINK THEY WOULD BE HAPPY ENOUGH TO SEE HIM GO IF HE COULD BE REPLACED BY A MODERATE SUCH AS KHALID AL HASSAN. HOWEVER, AS LONG AS THIS SEEMS UNLIKELY THEY WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO SUPPORT ARAFAT. WE EXPECT THE SAG TO CONTINUE TYPICALLY CAUTIOUS IN DEALING WITH THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION. AT THE SAME TIME WE DETECT A WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER NEW AND IMAGINATIVE APPROACHES TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM.

11. IN CONCLUSION, WE THINK THERE IS RELATIVELY LITTLE THAT THE SAG CAN DO TO BRING ORDER OUT OF THE PRESENT CHAOS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, BUT THAT IT WILL CONTINUE TO TRY. WE THINK THESE SAUDI EFFORTS WILL BE GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE US INTEREST IN PREVENTING A MORE GENERAL CONFLAGRATION AND IN CREATING THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH A RENEWED PEACE EFFORT COULD POSSIBLY MAKE SOME PROGRESS.  
PORTER

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